

Biographical Sketch

Carol Obrochta

I am a resident of Richmond, Virginia, and the mother of a young woman who was identified as having serious mental health problems when she was 18 months old. She first received mental health services when she was four and she continues to receive treatment at the age of 31. My daughter has been successful in her education and career – due to many factors, including the quality of services during her childhood and adolescence and the ability of our family to find information and support in our community which helped us to be full participants in her treatment.

I have worked in the area of family support and children's mental health since 1986 in a variety of positions. These include working in state government (children's mental health and developmental disabilities), for our University Affiliated Program on Developmental Disabilities in our Parent to Parent statewide program; as director of Virginia's statewide family network for families; as a staff member of the national Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and as a free-lance trainer and communication specialist on family and professional collaboration and community-building. I was also the director of the Statewide Family Networks Technical Assistance Center, based in Sacramento, for 14 months where I built a strong advisory board and developed and implemented the plan for providing technical assistance to 42 statewide family networks. I have also served as a leader of a Robert Wood Johnson Urban Health Initiative to engage business leaders in recognizing investment in children's services and supports as an economic as well as social investment.

My most significant experience in evaluation of children's mental health programs was from 1993 to 1999, when I conducted site visits for both the University of South Florida and MACRO International. During this time, I visited twenty-nine sites to conduct intensive family centered evaluations and systems evaluations for USF and MACRO. At each of these twenty-nine locations (as diverse as the South Bronx, Minot and Bismarck, North Dakota and the Navajo Nation), I interviewed systems of care providers and families. These included heads of local and/or state DSS, MH, DOH, ED and DJJ agencies; direct service providers including case managers and therapists; and families and their self-identified networks of informal supports. I reviewed case files on children from multiple agencies and wrote reports for the federal government reflecting the level of "systemness" within each network.

Last year, I made a conscious decision to slow my national work and to return my energies back to the Commonwealth of Virginia where I continue to work as an advocate for children, families and the systems who care for them. I am currently working as a free-lance researcher and writer, primarily for Voices for Virginia's Children. I serve in leadership roles for two non-profit organizations, "ART 180" and "Women in Transition." I also serve on a committee reviewing evidence-based practice for dually diagnosed adolescents at Virginia Commonwealth University and as an advisor to the North Richmond Partnership for Families.